



April 14, 2022

SUBMITTED VIA ONLINE SUBMISSION FORM

National Freedom of Information Officer
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (2822T)
Washington, DC 20460
(202) 566-1667

RE: Freedom of Information Act Request

To the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) FOIA Officer:

The Center for Food Safety (CFS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that addresses the impacts of our current industrial food production system on species and the environment. CFS has a long history of promoting sustainable farming practices and advocating and litigating for the ban of chemical applications, such as neonicotinoid pesticides and herbicides. Consistent with this mission and pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(2)(i) and the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552, CFS respectfully requests the following information:

Any and all documents concerning EPA's consultations under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for registrations or reviews of fungicides from 2012 until the present.

"Any and all documents" includes, but is not limited to, all communications, correspondence, minutes, memoranda, maps, plans, drawings, emails, reports, databases, and notes. This request includes all documents that have ever been within your custody or control, whether produced by you or by any others, and includes all current and former working, investigative, retired, electronic, and/or other files.

This request is being sent to the EPA FOIA Officer with the understanding that it will be forwarded to other officers, offices, or departments with information pertinent to this request.

REQUEST FOR FEE-WAIVER

CFS requests that pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(2)(i), EPA waive all fees in connection with the procurement of this information. As demonstrated below, the nature of this request meets the test for fee waiver as expressed in the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(2)(i).

In determining whether the fee waiver criteria is satisfied, CFS respectfully reminds the EPA that FOIA is inclined toward disclosure and that the fee waiver amendments were enacted

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to allow further disclosure to nonprofit, public interest organizations. *See* 132 Cong. Rec. S. 14270-01, (statement of Sen. Leahy) (“[A]gencies should not be allowed to use fees as an offensive weapon against requesters seeking access to Government information.”). Furthermore, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has interpreted this fee waiver section broadly, holding that the section “is to be liberally construed in favor of waivers for noncommercial requesters.” *McClellan Ecological Seepage Situation v. Carlucci*, 835 F.2d 1282, 1284 (9th Cir. 1987) (citing Sen. Leahy).

The factors EPA must consider in deciding a fee waiver request are laid out in 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(2)(i) and those relating to a significant contribution to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Whether the subject matter of the request involves issues that will significantly contribute to the public understanding of the operations or activities of the Agency.
- (2) Whether the contents of the records to be disclosed have an informative value.
- (2) Whether the disclosure of the information will likely contribute to an understanding of the subject by the general public.
- (4) Whether the contribution to public understanding is significant.

40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(2)(i).

I. THE PRESENT DISCLOSURE IS IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST BECAUSE IT WILL SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTE TO PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE OPERATIONS OR ACTIVITIES OF GOVERNMENT.

The requested disclosure will contribute to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

A. The subject of the disclosure concerns “the operations and activities of the government.”

The requested information pertains to the EPA’s ESA Section 7 consultations regarding fungicides. It is irrefutable that EPA’s consultations are a clearly identifiable operation of the government. The information sought by CFS reflects an interest in supporting this mission to ensure the safety of fungicides and is of the utmost concern to the public. This disclosure will demonstrate to the public at large the nature of EPA’s consultation process for registrations and review of fungicides.

B. The disclosure is “likely to contribute significantly to public understanding” of government operations or activities.

As discussed in the previous section, the present disclosure will provide the public with a better understanding of EPA’s consultations under ESA Section 7 for fungicides. Simultaneously, disclosure of the requested information will aid CFS in fulfilling its function of

public oversight of government action. Public oversight of agency action, specifically, is a vital component in our democratic system and is the bedrock upon which FOIA stands.

C. CFS is highly qualified to analyze the requested information, and also aptly positioned to disseminate it to the public.

CFS is a nonprofit, public interest organization with over one million farmer and consumer supporters nationwide that informs, educates, and counsels the public—via legal action, our website, our True Food Network, books and reports, and our quarterly newsletter, *Food Safety Now!*—on the harm done to human health and the environment by industrial agriculture. Through nearly two decades of involvement in technical analysis, environmental litigation, and policymaking as it relates to pesticide safety, CFS has gained unique expertise and an extensive background in issues with industrial agriculture, and specifically in issues surrounding pesticide use and its effect on the environment. Regarding effects of pesticides on pollinators, CFS has litigated groundbreaking cases, repeatedly submitted comments and petitions to state and federal agencies, and published legal articles on federal oversight processes. Consequently, CFS is highly qualified to fully comprehend, analyze, and organize the requested records.

In addition, CFS is aptly positioned to disseminate the requested information because we have a long history of educating the public about the negative effects of pesticides used on the environment. For example, CFS has educated and informed consumers and its members about pesticides by, among other things, creating publicity campaigns; producing books, reports, and a newsletter; and maintaining a website that includes numerous articles about developments in attendant pesticide use, and its consequent human health, animal welfare, and environmental harms. Accordingly, CFS is an effective vehicle to disseminate information to the general public about EPA's Section 7 consultations on fungicides to safeguard against the harms of fungicide use.

Federal courts have found that dissemination to 2,500 people through a newsletter and the intent to start a website is sufficient to meet the “reasonably broad audience” factor. *Forest Guardians v. U.S. Dep't of Interior*, 416 F.3d 1173, 1180 (10th Cir. 2005). Moreover, they have found that the proven ability to digest and disseminate highly technical information, as demonstrated by past analysis and dissemination, merits giving nonprofit organizations fee waivers. *See W. Watersheds Project v. Brown*, 318 F.Supp.2d 1036, 1040 (D. Idaho 2004). CFS's activity in these respects far outstrips any minimums established by judicial interpretation.

II. OBTAINING THE INFORMATION IS OF NO COMMERCIAL INTEREST TO CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY.

As noted, CFS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit environmental advocacy organization that works to address the impacts of our industrial food production system on human health, animal welfare, and the environment. CFS works to achieve its goals through grassroots campaigns, public education, media outreach, and litigation. Under FOIA, a commercial interest is one that furthers a commercial, trade, or profit interest as those terms are commonly understood. *See, e.g.,* OMB Fee Guidelines, 52 Fed. Reg. 10017-18. Such interests are not present in this request. Specifically, in no manner does CFS seek information from EPA for commercial gain or interest.

CFS respectfully files this FOIA request pursuant to its goal of educating the general public about the EPA's consultations under the ESA Section 7 regarding fungicides. Upon request and free of charge, CFS will provide members of the public with relevant information obtained from the agency.

Based upon the foregoing, CFS requests that this FOIA be classified within EPA's fee waiver category and that EPA send the requested information as required by law. As this is a matter of extreme importance to CFS, we look forward to your reply within twenty working days as required by FOIA. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i). If the responsive records are voluminous please contact us to discuss the proper scope of the response. If any exemption from FOIA's disclosure requirement is claimed, please describe in writing the general nature of the document and the particular legal basis upon which the exemption is claimed. Should any document be redacted, please indicate the location of the redaction through the use of black ink. Please provide any and all non-exempt portions of any document that may be partially exempt due to some privilege as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973).

Please send all materials to mstevenson@centerforfoodsafety.org. Electronic materials are preferred but if records must be mailed, please send to the 303 Sacramento Street, 2nd Floor San Francisco, CA 94111. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

/s/ Meredith Stevenson

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